

May 18, 2014 Living Stones

I Peter 2:2-10

This great affirmation of faith found in I Peter always stirs me. Peter proclaims Jesus to be a living stone, the cornerstone on which all of our faith is built. This we know. But then he ends: “once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” I like the idea that we are all living stones built upon Jesus, the cornerstone. After all, the church down through the centuries has been built on the lives and sacrifices of those who have gone before us. Today is heritage Sunday within the United Methodist Church tradition. It is the Sunday before May 24th when John Wesley, the founder of what would become the United Methodist Church, had a religious experience where he came to have a personal relationship with God.

“According to his journal, Wesley found that his enthusiastic gospel message had been rejected by his Anglican brothers. Heavy-hearted, he went to an evening society meeting on Aldersgate Street “very unwillingly.” It was there, while someone was reading from Martin Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, that he felt that his heart was “strangely warmed.” He describes it as:

I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

It is from this experience that Wesley would go on to preach a doctrine of personal piety and faith. He proclaimed a message of grace and forgiveness. It is this living stone of his experience on which our lives of faith as United Methodist are built. Again, to quote Peter: “once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” or we could say this is how we became or remain, God’s people through this living stone called John Wesley.

Another, not well known living stone on which the Methodist Church in America was built is a woman by the name of Barbara Heck who was born in Ireland in 1734 and

died in Canada in August 1804. She was a member of a colony of Germans escaping religious persecution that settled in County Limerick about 1708. She married Paul Heck, a member of the same community. By the preaching of John Wesley many of these Germans became converts to Methodism. The Heck's emigrated from Ireland about 1760, and settled in New York, where there were other Methodists from Ireland. They had no pastor and grew careless of religious observances. In 1765 they were joined by Philip Embury, who had been a local Methodist preacher in Ireland. Soon after his arrival, Mrs. Heck entered a room in which, according to some accounts, Embury was present, and found the emigrants gambling at cards. She seized the cards and threw them into the fire and then went to Embury and charged him that he should preach to them, or God would require their blood at his hands. He maintained he couldn't inasmuch as he had neither church nor congregation. "Preach in your own home, and I will gather a congregation", Barbara replied. The mustard seed beginning consisted of four people: Barbara, her husband, a laborer, and a black female servant. They persevered. Just when it seemed that the mustard seed would never germinate and multiply, Captain Thomas Webb appeared. He was regimental commander of the British forces at Albany and a Methodist preacher. Standing erect attired in the famous redcoat, Webb preached and the congregation grew. (In addition to his redcoat, Webb wore a green patch over one eye. He had been wounded at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, when Quebec fell to the British.) Soon the congregation had outgrown the private home where it was meeting. A church-building would have to be built, and Barbara herself designed it, the first Methodist church-building in the new world. St. John's church in New York City that still is in ministry today. Again, a living stone reminding us of our need to be faithful and live our faith at all times and in all places.

Now we move to the Northwest. We come to Brother Mack. Have you ever wondered why this church has a Brother Mack room? Andrew Jackson McNemee was born in Portland, Oregon, on March 5, 1848. In 1866 the family moved down the Columbia River to the Chinook fishing grounds. Young McNemee at an early age felt called into the ministry. However, because his parents were aging, he felt needed at home, and it wasn't until January 1870 that he entered Willamette University. He says, "I

was so eager to get an education that I was willing to go ragged, hungry, and pay almost any price for the privilege of attending school.” In the fall of 1871 he was granted a license to preach, and he remained in school at Willamette University until the spring of 1876, suffering great hardships in order to do so. After a failed attempt to enter Boston School of Theology, he walked over 100 miles to Albany, where the Methodist Oregon Conference was meeting in August of 1876 to offer his services as a supply preacher. He was assigned to the Whatcom County Circuit and served other circuits before being assigned in 1888 to the Dungeness Circuit, which included Port Angeles, Dungeness, Sequim, Port Discovery Bay, and Leland Valley. He says, “It took me three weeks to make the rounds of my circuit.”

The building of the first Methodist Church at Dungeness was begun during Brother Mack's tenure. In his book, *Brother Mack, the Frontier Preacher*, he says, “A former pastor and I had secured two lots and \$365 on subscription for building a church. After our meetings I took up this work and had the church nearly completed when the Seattle fire came, and we lost all of our windows, doors and pews in the fire. I felt badly broken up over this as I had spent hard labor and all the money I had trying to finish the church.” When asked by the District Superintendent if the Dungeness church wanted him to be returned for another year, their answer was, “Brother Mack has done a good work here this year, but we need a preacher who has a wife that can play the organ and lead in the Sunday School, etc.” The church over which he had labored so hard was completed in 1889 after he left for his new assignment with the Lopez and San Juan Island Circuit.

Brother Mack was appointed to the Sequim Circuit in 1905 and again in 1906, where he “found many old friends. I spent two years of hard work, made some improvements on the church, built an addition to the parsonage and a large shed for the horses to stand under. This gave me more satisfaction than anything else as I felt sorry to see these dumb animals standing out in the storm while their owners were in church. I paid out for improvements these two years \$350 and received on salary \$652-\$300 the first year and \$352 the second year.”

In 1910, while serving at Langley, Brother Mack, at the age of 62, was

summarily asked to retire, possibly because of ill health. He petitioned to be sent back to the Dungeness Circuit, since it was a small circuit and he had made many friends there, and the new Presiding Elder agreed to have to have him take charge of that circuit. To quote Brother Mack, "There had not been any pastor there for a long time, and the church and parsonage were in bad condition. The three years I spent in Dungeness [1910-1913] were the best years that I ever had in the ministry. At the close of my third year many asked for my return for another year but I felt it would be better for me to go to Chimacum."

Brother Mack retired in 1916 to Langley where he lived out his life. He died there in 1936 at the age of 88. He never married; he was a circuit walker who never owned a horse; he covered untold wooded miles to reach his assigned parishes, many times without food or lodging and seldom with a coin in his pocket, a resourceful and able man.

Brother Mack is another living stone who reminds us that we are called to be faithful, to support the work of God in the places we meet.

Another set of living stones are Willie and Laura Dey. They came to Sequim from Kansas in 1902 to be near his parents who had moved here a couple of years before. Willie and Laura joined the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in Dungeness in 1902 and transferred their membership to Sequim in 1904. The first Methodist Church in Sequim was built in 1895 on an acre of ground donated by Mrs. Brown. The original church at Dungeness, the one started by Brother Mac, was taken down and moved to Sequim as the basis for the first church here. The church bell also was taken from the Dungeness church and brought to Sequim. In 1928 the small church in Sequim was torn down and a large building erected at a cost of \$17,500. Several families in the congregation mortgaged their homes to provide financing. Among them were Willie and Laura Dey, J.W. Gillespie, and... The six stained glass windows in the sanctuary of our present church were originally installed in the 1929 Sequim Ave. Church. They were purchased by various families in the congregation with the exception of the one entitled Prayer or In the Garden which was a gift from the congregation in honor of Willie and Laura Dey. They remained members until their deaths in the mid 1950's.

Again living stones like the Deys made it possible for the church here in Sequim to grow and prosper. We celebrate their long time dedication and pledge anew to work at strengthening and supporting the work of the church.

The final living stone I want to talk about is Margaret Blake. She is instrumental in the present church being in its current location. When it became apparent to the congregation that they would need a different building they began to look at property around the city. Margaret approached the church offering to sell a five acre parcel on Blake Ave. It was a cattle pasture behind the Blake business. She offered to sell the land for about half of its market value. There was one condition. The church would use Blake Sand and Gravel for any gravel and cement work needed. It was agreed and Gordon Wayne, one of the chairs of the building committee remembers Margaret sitting on the front porch of her home watching the work. If she didn't think the men pouring the cement were doing it right she would hustle over and give them a piece of her mind. She and her husband Charles, known as Cheech were active members of this congregation all their adult lives. She passed away in 2007.

We give thanks for these living stones. We too are living stones. Someday five or ten years or more from now people might talk about us, what we have done, how we have lived our faith. May what we do add glory to the work God began in Jesus Christ our corner stone.